

CRAWFISH ETOUFFEE

Serves 4

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| ½ cup butter | ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper |
| ¼ cup flour | 1 tsp. salt (or to taste) |
| 3 cups chopped onion | 1 tsp. paprika |
| ½ cup chopped celery | ½ tsp. Tabasco sauce |
| ½ cup chopped green bell pepper | 1¼ cup shrimp stock or chicken stock |
| 2 tsp. minced garlic | 1 lb. peeled crawfish tails |
| ½ tsp. basil | ½ cup thinly sliced green onions |
| ½ tsp. black pepper | 1 Tbls. chopped parsley |
| ½ tsp. white pepper | |

Set a large heavy bottomed Dutch oven over a medium heat. Melt the butter, add the flour and make a roux the color of peanut butter. (See roux photo, page 10). Add the chopped onion, celery and bell pepper. Cook until the onions are translucent and the celery and bell pepper are tender. Add the garlic, basil, black pepper, white pepper, cayenne pepper, salt and paprika and cook for two minutes. Stir in the Tabasco sauce and stock and bring to a gentle boil. Add the crawfish tails, green onions and parsley. Simmer for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve over steamed rice.

FIRST YOU MAKE A ROUX

To a seasoned local, the phrase “first you make a roux” clearly and succinctly communicates a common beginning to a recipe. “Light or dark” or “oil or butter” would be the only appropriate question, and in the context of the recipe, even that would likely be unnecessary. But to the uninitiated, the task seems to require great culinary skill, maybe some specialized cooking utensils, and perhaps a basic grasp of the French language.

Simply stated, roux is nothing more than flour cooked in some sort of fat. For most Creole and Cajun cooking the fat is vegetable oil (peanut oil,

soybean oil) and the flour is cooked to varying shades of brown. The recipes in this book call for either a light “peanut butter colored” roux, or a dark roux, about the color of chocolate.

Here’s the procedure: Use a heavy bottomed pan such as black iron, enamel clad iron, or good quality stainless steel with a slab of aluminum fused to the bottom of the pot. The pot should be large enough to be easily and thoroughly stirred with a wire whip, and to accommodate the rest of the ingredients called for in the recipe.

Place the oil in the pot and set it over a medium high heat. Whisk in the flour, making sure it is evenly blended and free of lumps. Continue stirring as the roux cooks and bubbles. The bubbles are an indication that moisture is being boiled out of the flour. As soon as the bubbling stops and the aroma becomes similar to popcorn, the flour is actually frying, and the rate of browning accelerates rapidly. In other words, pay very close attention from this point on.

Stir constantly, and as soon as the proper color is attained, carefully add the seasoning vegetables. The addition of room temperature ingredients will immediately lower the temperature of the roux and, halting the browning process, will prevent the roux from burning. Also, the natural sugars contained in onions added at this time will immediately start to caramelize, releasing a wonderful savory flavor. After adding the seasoning vegetables, reduce the heat a bit and proceed with the rest of the recipe.

Most gumbo recipes call for a dark roux, rendering a deep color and nutty flavor. A lighter roux works better for sauces, because the less flour is cooked, the more thickening power it maintains. And remember, burned roux tastes awful and cannot be salvaged. Throw it out and start over. One way to quickly master roux making is to cook one sacrificial roux — keep cooking and stirring until it actually does burn. You will witness all the stages of the process, and any ‘roux making fear’ will dissolve.

One more note — be careful! Splattering roux can cause painful burns.